

Facing fed heat? They'll be there

On a frigid, sunny morning, two

sisters stand side by side at their easels in a large studio in Norwell. A clear

light streams in behind them from seven large windows facing north — the best location for artists.

Constance Flavell Pratt, who owns the house built in 1890, and Jane Flavell Collins, who lives in Duxbury, are finishing portraits of young girls.

Both are seniors, well-known portrait painters who often work together. They're also survivors in a disappearing sideline: courtroom artists who, on short notice, take their pastels and sketch pads into federal courtrooms, where cameras are not allowed. It's a fast-paced job.



A GOOD AGE

Sue Scheible

"If someone is on the stand for just three minutes, you have to get an initial likeness and finish it later," Collins says. She began doing the courtroom

assignments in Boston in the late 1970s and recruited her sister in 1982. They've often covered court together, Collins for Channel 4; Pratt for Channel 5.

But their artistic bread and butter has always come from their other pursuits. Pratt is best known for her portraits; Collins specializes in landscapes. Both have won many art show awards.

When they get together to work, they exchange helpful suggestions — a different highlight here, a warmer tone



USA BU/The Patriot Ledger

■ Constance Flavell Pratt, 81, of Norwell, left, and her sister Jane Flavell Collins, 70, of Duxbury, enjoy working side by side in the studio and in the courtroom.

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LISA BUL/The Patriot Ledger

Jane Flavell Collins, left, and Constance Flavell Pratt, sisters who grew up in Rockland, are courtroom portrait artists who have covered cases in federal district court in Boston for local television stations.

South Shore sisters capture light in portraits, darkness in courtroom

■ AGE

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there – but they're also apt to talk about memorable court cases. Once cameras were allowed in the state courts in the 1980s, those assignments fell off, but they remain familiar figures in the federal courts in Boston.

"We see them frequently," said Susan Goldberg, deputy circuit executive for the U.S. First Circuit Court of Appeals.

Collins was in federal district court on Feb. 27 for the case of Joseph Salvati, 71, and Peter Limone, 69. The two, along with the families of two other men who died in prison, are suing the federal government for \$100 million. Their convictions in the 1965 gangland murder of Edward "Teddy" Deegan were overturned in 2001, because of new information linked to false testimony by FBI informant Joseph "The Animal" Barboza.

The artists say the saddest and most tragic case they've covered was the 2003 murder trial of Gary Sampson, 44, who confessed to killing three men, including Jonathon

Rizzo, a 19-year-old college student from Kingston, and Phillip McCloskey, 69, a former Quincy resident from Taunton, in a three-state crime spree in July 2001.

Their biggest international trial was that of terrorist Richard Reid, the so-called "shoe bomber" who tried to ignite explosives in his shoes on a flight from Europe that landed in Boston in December 2001.

Pratt and Collins grew up in Rockland. They drew and painted as children and graduated from the Massachusetts College of Art. While Collins taught art for a few years at Rockland High School, Pratt always favored portraiture.

"I think of portraits as the ultimate challenge – you have to be absolutely fascinated by it," she says. "I'm never bored – it's observation all the way."

She begins by drawing the live subject and continues in her studio, working from photographs. She's always looking for features that tell her, "This is that person . . . the expression of the mouth and how you do noses are the most important. Noses are the only thing that stick out on a

face – and there are so many ways of their doing that."

Collins, 11 years younger than Pratt, followed in her older sister's direction but soon developed her own style. She likes to do landscapes – something Pratt says she could never master.

The studio walls are covered with paintings, drawings and photographs. Dozens of framed portraits are stored in a loft above; papers, contest ribbons and invitations to openings lie about.

Pratt points to a pastel portrait of a white-haired man, done many years ago. She can't remember his name, but the way the light hit his cheekbones, the way his hair stuck out, the curl of his bottom lip remain a vivid memory.

I first interviewed Pratt in 1982, when she was 56. Back then, she said, "When you get to be my age, you are conscious of the fact that you don't have that many years left to waste. I'm busy all day, every day with my art."

Twenty-five years later at age 81, that's still true. Since her husband, Bob, a jewelry maker, died last April, she's

had to spend more time on household business, but she's apt to stay up until 4 a.m., absorbed in her work.

"Art is something you can do no matter what your age, and I can do it at home, right here," she says. "The world is so full of faces. All of them are interesting to me, and many are willing to sit still for you."

"I feel very lucky that this is what I like to do better than anything."